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Go Art and Philosophy

By Hajime Okada

Chapter one - Pioneers

Imagine you are standing somewhere in the streets of medieval Kyoto about four hundred years ago. You can see a great number of mercantile and artisan houses standing along a broad street leading to the Imperial Palace. Looking in at one of them, you see a craftsman in ornaments working hard with apprentices. At other houses there are potters, lacquer ware craftsmen, sword smiths, armors and harness makers and mat makers, and they put their heart into their own job. Carpenters, plasterers and tillers are very busily working together at a building site. Dropping in at some shops, you can find cloths, ornaments, incenses, drugs, sake, candles, oils and so on, A variety of foods, including dried fishes and fruits, vegetables and raw fishes are on wood showcases. Turning your eyes to the street, you can watch peddlers, sightseers, shoppers, monks, samurai and townsmen walking or running there on the street. Not only men and women are going up and down the street, but also there are horses and cattle being led. Some palatial residences are dotted among these commoners' houses. There are more temples and shrines. Then you notice all of them are brand new or being built. Only several years have passed since the long disturbances of domestic warfare in which the whole city reduced to ruin once was pacified at last. Now people seem to get younger and start enjoying life to the full. Birds are flying above tiled roofs shinning by the reflected light of the sun. The graceful figures of a five-storied pagoda of Toji temple stands out clear against the blue sky and hills in the distance. Far to the south of that, you can see the donjon of the Fushimi castle overlooking Kyoto town, where the de facto ruler of this country lives with his family and valets.

Travelers from abroad are less than before. The law that prohibits Japanese people from Christianity is rigorously enforced and missionaries have been deported. You are not out of any danger here, though aliens are allowed to enter this country still. Fortunately, it is likely that you happen to meet a kind man. You are telling him what you have come for in Japan, "I'm a good go player, traveling to all the corners of the world, just seeking for the best players. Could you possibly introduce anyone? " "I'll be glad to", he answers, "we have a priest called Nikkai. I hear he is the master among masters. He lives at the Takeya Street. Not far" Thus he took you to a Buddhist temple facing one of the streets.



Okuni Kabuki Screen

Six-fold screen, color on gold-leafed paper
Proportions: 88.0 x 268.0 cm
[Kyoto National Museum](http://www.kyomuseum.jp/)

The introduction of go to Japan is assumed to have taken place somewhere between the fifth and eighth centuries. Evidence that go gained in popularity among aristocracy in the years around 1000 can be seen in the Tale of Genji which has an abundance of leisurely descriptions of court life in the Japan Heian Period (794-1191). It is fair to assume that the game spread to the lower classes as well. In so far as arts and entertainments were concerned, the nobility did not live in close confinements, but could keep company with anybody who came from the lower strata of society. In Japanese medieval world the clergy of the Buddhists were free to come and go. It is generally told that they were mediators between social classes. Go also must be popular with people, and if they had been to record them, we could have found some of them interesting and inspiring. Even so, little is known about go before reunification of Japan was achieved in 1600. We would start to examine the games kept from being scattered and lost, games of Honinbo Sansa (1559-1623) and those of Nakamura Doseki (1582-1630) who is Sansa's best successor.

In the early go practice each player used to occupy a pair of diagonally opposite hoshi (4-4 point) before starting to play. This invariably resulted in a fighting style of play, and typically that the game would consist of a series of fights from the beginning to the end. It is generally told and believed that abandoning this manner made the modern style of go possible, and Japanese go experienced rapid and significant progress and it became far superior to that of the Chinese.



Flowers and Plants
Kaiho Yusho

Paintings

Momoyama Period (16th Century)
Myoshini-ji Temple, Kyoto
Important Cultural Property

It must have been a Copernican change to abandon this traditional manner which had been very long very usual since the introduction from China. Some people have ever suggested this should be included one of Honinbo Sansa's deeds. It can reasonably be assumed that he may have made some contribution, but after all, the real situation is wrapped in mystery.

The young bonze now sitting with an affable smile on his face before you, though wearing bonze cloths and gown, and shaved his head, has something about it that reminded a prince of an unknown kingdom. His youthfulness surprises you. In fact, he is in his mid-thirties but looks only twenty-five or so. He doesn't seem religious or mysterious to you. You think he is just a genial and friendly priest whom one just can't dislike.

Overflowing with good will, he is looking upon you with a lenient eye. It is the very person who later would be known

as Honinbo Sansa.

As you ask him for a game, immediately he complies with the request. When you take black and casually start to play in upper right corner, he stares in wonder. He is asking, "You have ever learnt somewhat about Japanese style, haven't you?"

He knows well that it is standard in China to set up four or five stones on the board beforehand. He wouldn't mind playing it according to Chinese manner. He has respect for Chinese masters and doesn't believe the level of Japanese games is higher. It surprises you that his moves and games are fast moving. "In my young days, I used to like much faster games. I have once played a few hundred games in a week"

Having come from a rich merchant household in Kyoto, he is a mild-tempered man who still has something of the well-bred little boy about him. He must have been a bright child. When he was eight years old, his father let him become a disciple of his uncle who was a teacher of a Buddhist temple. He was to learn Buddhism, but more quickly learned go.

Just about that time a revolution was initiated by a young provincial lord, that leads a major turning point in the history of Japan. His name was Oda Nobunaga. He was born of one of minor feudal lords in a province of Owari (Nagoya city nowadays and the surrounding neighborhood). A long period of ineffectual government of Ashikaga clan extended for more than one hundred years. He had a strong desire to become the absolute ruler of Japan, and built up his invincible army. Hostile operations and military subjugation were repeated, and finally, Nobunaga succeeded in capturing Kyoto in 1568, and instituted his powerful military regime. After a lapse of ten years, Nobunaga's provisional government established its rule over the central area of Japan, and still his troops were marching east and west. Gradually, Sansa came to give full play to his talent and gained a great reputation as the strongest go player. Soon hearing that, Nobunaga felt much interested and received Sansa to watch his game. Nobunaga were full of curiosity about novelties and marvels like a child. He liked go and had much confidence in his own ability to play go. He tested Sansa by himself, and consequently he couldn't help admiring Sansa's exquisite skill. He praised Sansa as the most valuable expert, "Meijin". Since then, people called him Meijin.

I would like to make a few more remarks about Nobunaga and the state of affairs in those days. In 1569, Nobunaga gave an interview to a missionary, Luis Flois, who wrote about Nobunaga in his report to Rome. The following is his words.

- His castle, Azuchi is a noble, magnificently gorgeous gold foiled castle tower. He is thirty-seven years old. He is tall and lean, and having thin mustache...He displays pride and haughtiness, and doesn't hide his contempt for the kings and the lords. He hates Buddhism, Shintoism and worship of any idols, and doesn't believe paganism and divination. He has no hesitation in saying that there is not either the creator of the universe or the life beyond death, and boldly denied the immortality of the soul.

- Nobunaga had a great contempt for conventionality.

Because his policy and measures are too violently revolutionary, secretly some people including a few of his vassals were getting fiercely hostile. In 1582, he was treacherously murdered by a division commander. Toyotomi Hideyoshi, whom Nobunaga trained from boyhood, and who was then the commander of the force in the western front, moved very quickly and defeated the rebel army. Hideyoshi restored law and order, and inherited power and wealth. He was not a good martial samurai but at excellent at manipulating people. He continued to eliminate remaining rivals in northern and southern provinces. In 1587, he subdued all of them. Japan was finally reunited.



Flowers and Plants
Kaiho Yusho

Hideyoshi came from a simple peasant background. Maybe a little paradoxically, he valued tradition and liked highly educated men. He fostered the arts. Therefore, during the reign of Hideyoshi, Kyoto had some memorable festivals - Fushimi Noh plays, Daigo cherry blossoms festival and Kitano tea party. Kitano tea ceremony meet was widely open to the public so that both common people and a number of celebrities could enjoy it together. Since he also liked go, in 1585 Hideyoshi called go players to host the first big tournament. At that day, Sansa and other players were honored with the emperor's inspection. This national go meet was held in 1588 again, and Sansa was ever triumphant so that he was granted a generous stipend and a privilege. Then, Hideyoshi made him boss all expert players, excepting his teacher, Senya.

He, together with his matches and pupils, was often invited to baronial home parties, where they showed their games to spectators.

Sansa and all his friends were born and bred in towns. They lived in three thriving towns, namely, Sakai and Osaka and Kyoto. These cities were located along a river system. Kyoto was the unrivaled metropolis of the nation for eight hundred years, and was maturing with age. The emperor kept on living in Kyoto, though he was only the titular head of Japan.

Sakai, this cosmopolitan city had the one of the main ports in Asia, trading with China, Korea, Vietnam, Philippines, Thai and other Asian countries. A quite few European people also showed up. In the sixteenth century Sakai became the largest gun manufacturing center in Japan, to which the city owed its prosperity most of all. Sansa's teacher, Senya was also a Sakaian.

Osaka was a planned city built by Toyotomi government. Osaka was surrounded by a moat and was partitioned into small characteristic towns settled around the castle.

Briefly, Kyotoites and Sakaians dominated the nation culturally and industrially, and this cultural domination was competing and collaborating with political domination of samurai came to Osaka from provinces.

Incidentally, We can enumerate a few men of culture at the time. Rikyu, he is the Japan's most famous master of the tea ceremony, which started to be enjoyed by wealthy merchants and feudal lords then. Hon'ami possessed s versatility of genius. He was a first-rate calligrapher but also produced a variety of fine crafts, such as gold and silver lacquer works, ceramic arts, and swords. A renowned painter, Kano and his school produced many wall pictures of room partitions for magnificent halls of the castles of Azuchi, Fushimi and so forth.

Hideyoshi's rule saw the flowering of these arts. It should be emphasized that these artists and go players shared a cultural background, and go must reflect their sense of values and views of life that existed within this group. Their vision was bright, and they were so lively that it could open out new vistas of the possibilities of this game.



**Maki'e Lacquered Poetry Chest
with Autumn Plants**

Designs
22.0 x 31.5 x 38.0cm
Momoyama Period (16th Century)
Kodai-ji Temple, Kyoto
Important Cultural Property
[Kyoto National Museum](#)

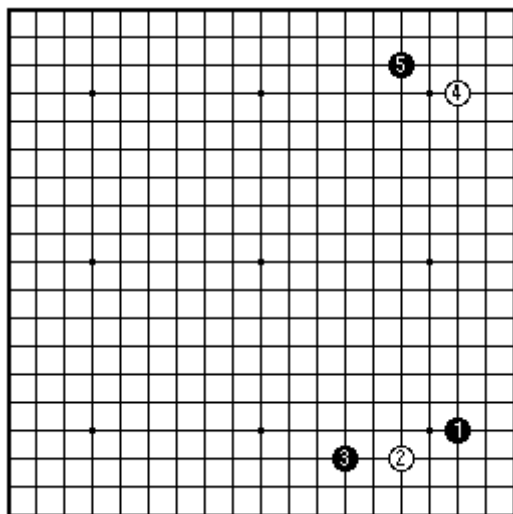


**Maple Tree Viewing in Takao
Kano Hideyori**

Painting
Proportions: 150.2 x 365.5
Muromachi Period (16th century)
[Tokyo National Museum](#)
National Treasure

After abandoning the mandatory cross arrangement, black's opening move was usually ko moku, i.e., the 3-4 point. Other opening plays were limited to taka moku (4-5 point) and moku hazushi (5-3 point). Above all, taka moku was used fairly often as white's first move.

It is worth noting that white's first move did not always occupy empty corners. Examining the games of Sansa and his colleagues, I estimate that only 50 percent of the second moves (white's first moves) was played in an empty corner. Then, black's response to this was one space pincer (7-3 position) normally. Therefore, the most typical opening in games of those days was composed of the following sequence of three moves: 1. b 3-4 position, 2. w 5-3 position, 3. b 7-3 position. I assume the two space pincer originated in the idea of avoiding a symmetrical arrangement. It could be taken up by chance. For instance, supposing that two players play with following the formula,



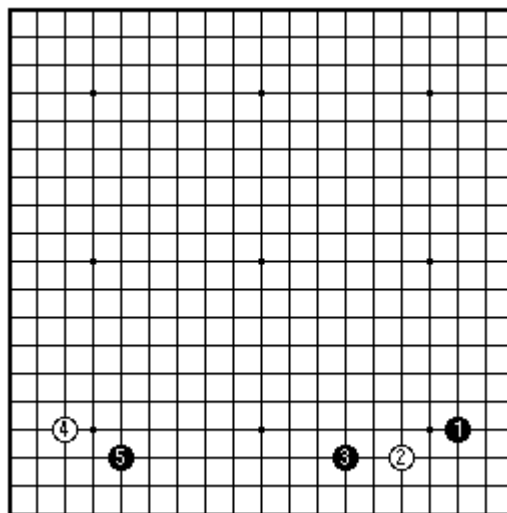
- 1.b R4, 2.w P3
3.b N3, 4.w R16
5.b P17

If white also plays a one space pincer at N17, black would probably take a central R10.

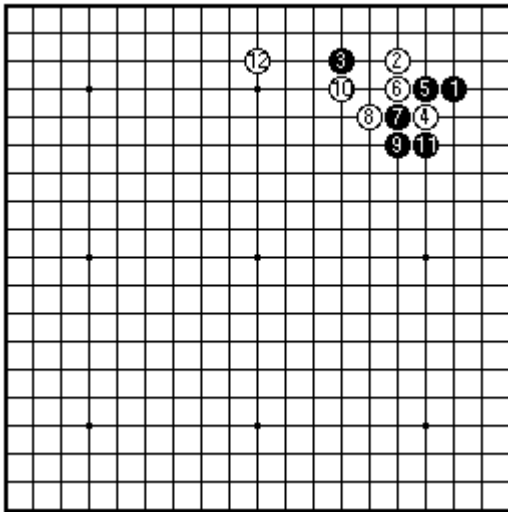
Or in another case,

1. b R4, 2. w P3
3. b N3, 4. w C4
5. b E3

If white pincers at G3 on 6th move, black could take the center point. The former case occurred in 1626 actually. Nakamura Doseki as a white played a two space pincer at the game with Yasui Santetsu the first (1590-1652).



For the fourth move, white has the first chance of choice. When white plays at 4-5 position, black answers with 3-5 position often, and black 4-4 is played a little often. The third and most important response is to play in some other corner, though it would be queried by today's people. There are large numbers of instances of the third manner.

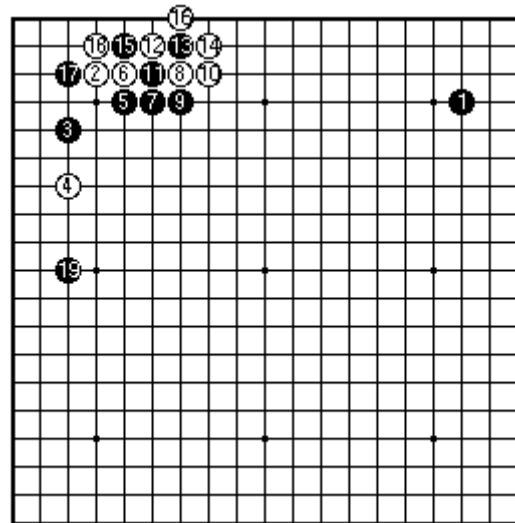


The following are examples of 4-4 and 3-5.

- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| 1. b R16 | 2. w P17 |
| 3. b N17 | 4. w Q15 |
| 5. b Q16 | 6. w P16 |
| 7. b P15 | 8. w O15 |
| 9. b P14 | 10. w N16 |
| 11. b Q14 | 12. w K17 |

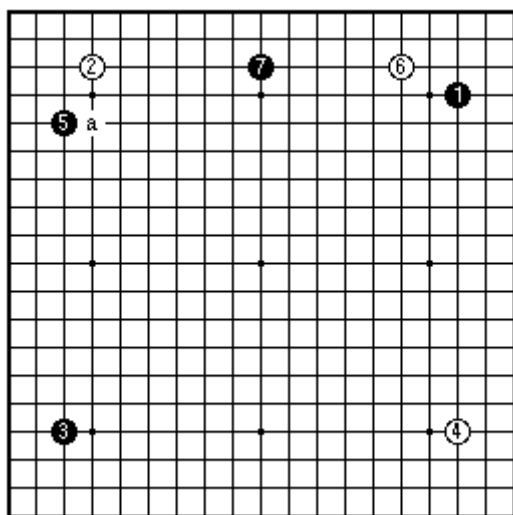
1. b R16 2. w D17
3. b C15 4. w C13
5. b E16 6. w E17
7. b F16 8. w G17
9. b G16 10. w H17
11. b F17 12. w F18
13. b G18 14. w H18
15. b E18 16. w G19
17. b C17 18. w D18
19. b C10

Both are taken from actual games played between Sansa and his rival, Rigen (1565 ?- ?)



In the second case, moving to the opposite corner, white has a chance to pincer at C13. Considering these two instances, we can find some basic josekis are quite well established. There are some dubious moves as white K12 overplaying of the first game, though.

The game below was more full of suggestions.



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|----------|----------|
| 1. b R16 | 2. w D17 |
| 3. b C4 | 4. w R4 |
| 5. b C15 | 6. w P17 |

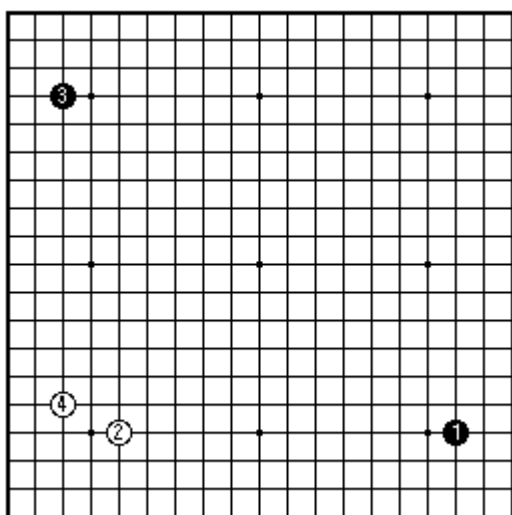
This game was played in Sansa's closing years. Two players seem to give the top priority to playing first in an empty corner. However, it took more several decades for the formula to be generally accepted as one of ground rules.

7. b K17

Black plays a four space pincer on 7th conspicuously.

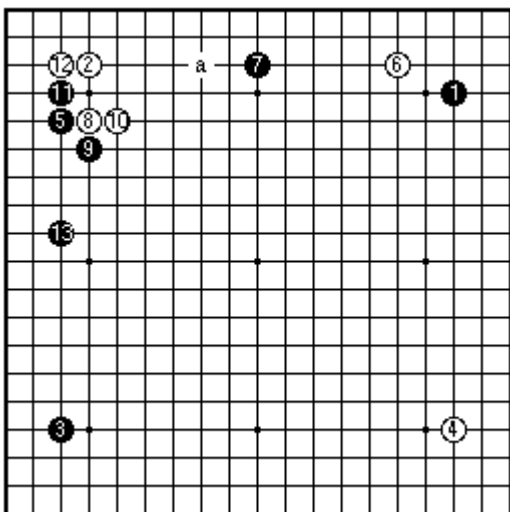
K. Iwamoto who is one of the modern Honinbo title holders comments this should be E4 or P3, and if black really want to play in the upper side, black may well play two or three space pincer. (L17 or M17) We should not ignore the fact that they didn't prefer securing a number of points of territory with corner enclosing move as E4.

In handicap games a large knight move (3-7) from hoshi (4-4) had became an established formula against an approach (6-3), which may help to explain why large corner enclosure (3-4 to 6-3) was appeared sooner than small one. Moreover, we can find an enclosure to moku hazushi (5-3) from taka moku (4-5) in the below game by Sansa (w) and Rigen (b).



- | | |
|----------|---------|
| 1. b R4 | 2. w E4 |
| 3. b C16 | 4. w C5 |

In my analysis of games of Sansa and Doseki, on the whole, players attached little importance to corner enclosure. In the closing part of this section, We would consider more this contradiction between their keen anxiousness to corner approach and indifference to enclosing corner.

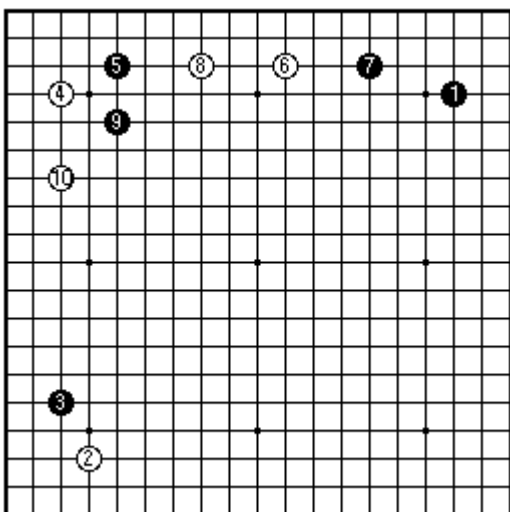
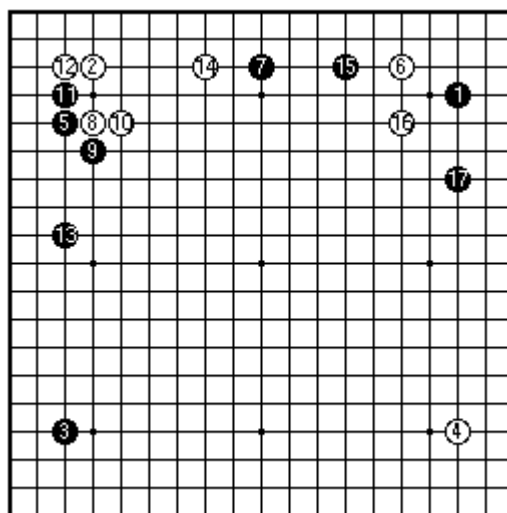


- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|-----|-----|---|-----|
| 7. | b | K17 | 8. | w | D15 |
| 9. | b | D14 | 10. | w | E15 |
| 11. | b | C16 | 12. | w | C17 |
| 13. | b | C11 | | | |

The sequence of moves up to 13th from 8th is a joseki that could be ever played nowadays. According to Ishida's Dictionary of Basic Joseki, white's moyo could be splendid when it is possible for white to play at K15 from white K17. In this case, since black already had K17, there are odds against white.

- | | | | |
|-----------|-----|---|-----|
| 13. b C11 | 14. | w | H17 |
| 15. b N17 | 16. | w | P15 |
| 17. b R13 | | | |

It is likely that on 15th move white's four space pincer found its target. White N17 combines an two space extension from K17 with a one space pincer. We have another game with the kindred manner to this.

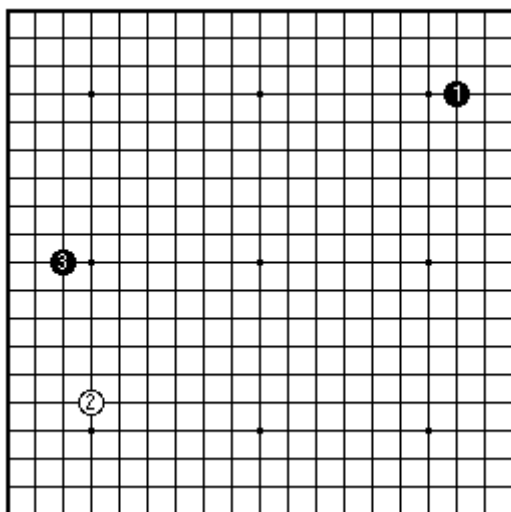


- | | | | |
|----------|-------|-----|-----|
| 1. b R16 | 2. | w | D3 |
| 3. b C5 | 4. | w | C16 |
| 5. b E17 | 6. | w | L17 |
| 7. b O17 | 8. | w | H17 |
| 9. b E15 | 10. w | C13 | |

This game is one of two games between Rigen and Doseki. Rigen's white H17 combines an two-space extension from L17 with a two space pincer for E17. Comparing these games, this white H17 is as effective as N17 of another game, and much securer than that. It gives white an easier course that they have not yet come

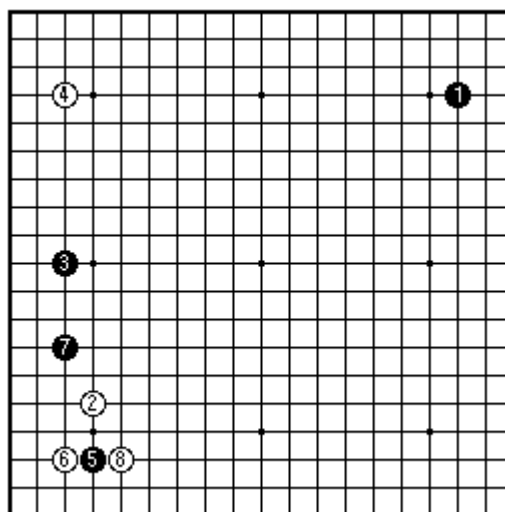
up with E14 instead of E15. Further, I would like to add a Doseki's game with one of his contemporaries, Bokunyu.

1. b R16
2. w D5
3. b C10



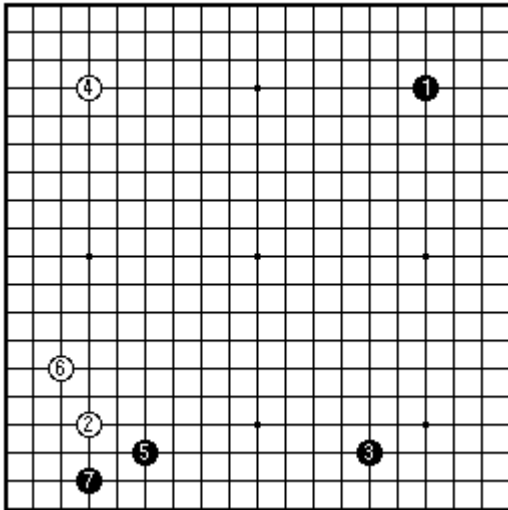
What should be called black C10? If there is a black set at upper left corner, C10 can be regarded as a large extension. Alternatively, if it is posted after black D3, C10 is a four space pincer. In case there is a white at upper left, we can consider it a wedging move. Anyway, I like to call it an impressive "appoggiatura"

3. b C10
4. w C16
5. b D3
6. w C3
7. b C7
8. w E3



Black plays at D3 on 5th move. C10 has come to virtually identical one to a four space pincer. However, there still remains our impression that these moves are in the wrong order. Here again we would hear a general comment that white 4th should have been an enclosing move at D3. As we have already seen, they had little experience playing corner enclosures. They seemed to like an outpost without any preparation. Many commentators are, therefore, critical of them. They maintain players in early time were poor at opening, and most of all mistakes were caused by their overestimation for moves in the side. However, this commonly accepted observation is oversimplified. I oppose a simple identification of means players used with what they were aiming for.

Every people tends to accept its own way as being the normal one and to praise or criticize others according as they are similar to or differ from it. I think each of them has its own limitations. Admittedly, it stands to reason that this kind of gambit went out of use, and yet we can take a following example from modern games. Black player is a Korean 4 dan player, Yang Kun.



1. b Q16 2. w D4
 3. b O3 4. w D16
 5. b F3 6. w C6
 7. b D2

Black's plot is very clear. He is seeing the area of the bottom side, but at once, designs against white Q4 coming or any in the downer left corner. From my point of view, it must be presumed that when Sansa and others play the first entry into a corner, they dose not aim at any enclosure at all, but anticipate opponent's approaching. Those who assent to this assumption might then understand that they play very

carefully in their beginning phase, being on the watch for the slightest weakness in their opponent. For them, fuseki meant a disposition for battle. The go board was as narrow as a chessboard. I would like to define their opening strategy which is unique in that it lacks corner enclosures as anti-security system. Players contrived elaborately the anti-security system to develop their combative style. Anti-security system is warlike. Through much modification of their style, it was sophisticated, and had a considerable influence on Honinbo Dosaku's style. Afterwards, the influence had been diminishing gradually until a friend of Go Seigen and Kitani, Yasunaga took it up again. Subsequently, his study and practice brought about a rebirth of it as a Chinese opening.

It is very often told that players who worked in the early Edo era played unrefined fuseki, and its clumsiness forms a striking contrast to their strength they could show in the middle phase. To be sure, this is true apparently, but we have heard people talking a similar account about Lee Chang ho.

Lastly, let us examine one of Doseki's games in his ripening period. The game was played with his follower, Inoue Inseki, at the emperor's palace in the latter half of 1620s.

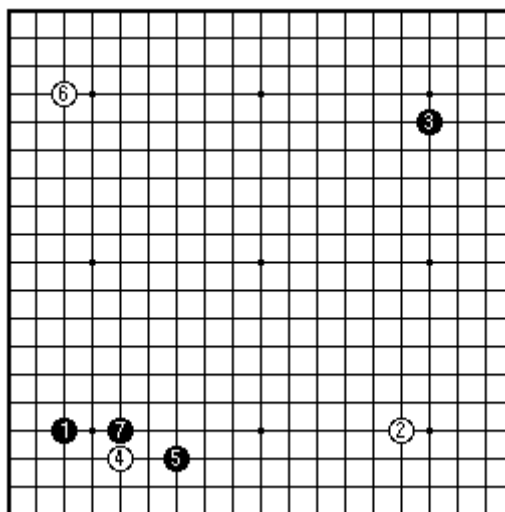
1. b C4 2. w P4
3. b Q15 4. w E3

Note white 2 P4 is a taka moku in other corner. As remarked above, taka moku was also a routine at white's first move.

5. b G3 6. w C16
7. b E4

Doseki (w) ignores black's pincer to be the first at upper left corner. He will wait until the proper time to move around here comes.

Although But black has sit back to see what will be happened, when white is just about to go to war. Black has lost his chance.

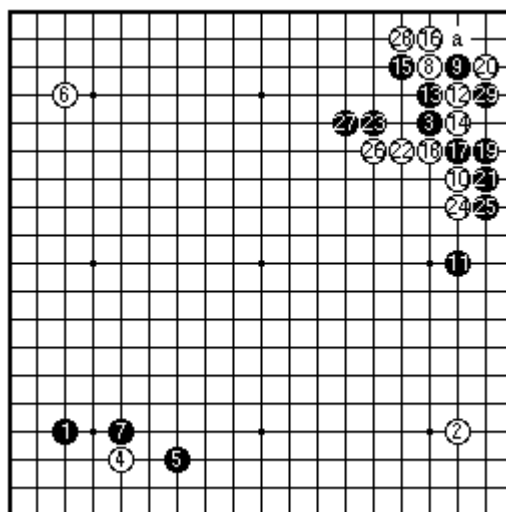


11. b R10 12. w R16
13. b Q16 14. w R15
15. b P17 16. w Q18
17. b R14 18. w Q14

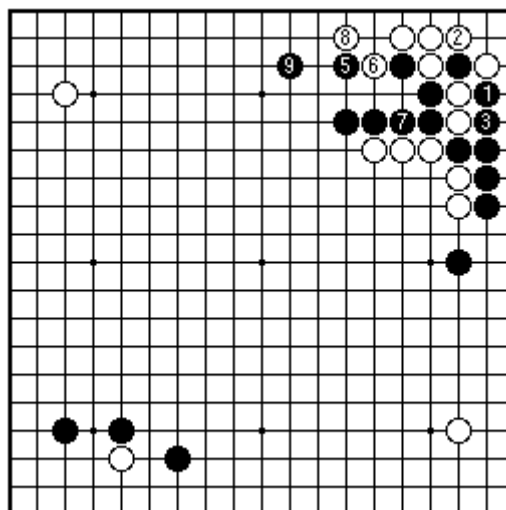
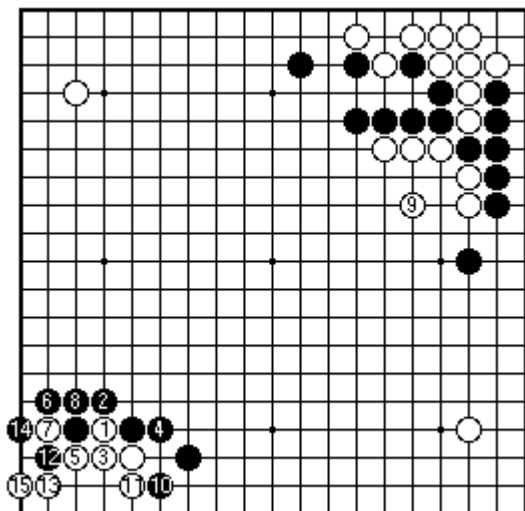
Black plays a series of blunders, while white Q14 is the best.

19. b S14 20. w S17
21. b S13 22. w P14
23. b O15 24. w R12
25. b S12 26. w O14
27. b N15 28. w P18

1. b S16 2. w R18
3. b S15 4. w R17
5. b N17 6. w O17
7. b P15 8. w N18
9. b L17



Black steps tesuji in succession. But white is still in control of the game.



1. w D4 2. w D5
3. b D3 4. w F4
5. b C3 6. w B5
7. b B4 8. w C5
9. b P12 10. w F2
11. b E2 12. w B3
13. b B2 14. w A4
15. b A2 (53th move)

Doseki gives a life to a white at down left corner, as well. His light stepping manner in this game or other examples strongly suggests us that he must not be deemed meanly. His ability to join fragmentary parts together into a marquetry is a premonitory sign of a style of Honinbo Dosaku, and many professionals in after age praised him. One of them, Hayashi Genbi said, "When I am looking over his games, I obtain relief from a headache"

Oh dear! You've lost the game. I thought you had enough chance to win. But you don't need to loose your heart. You are very lucky. Sansa seems to be very pleased with your eagerness.

"It was a tough game. I'm just lucky, but you played very well. If you can stay here to learn more skills of go, I'm sure, you will be a considerable player in this country. How's that? ...There's no call for you to worry. Leave all it to me. I have a lot of pull" Indeed, he has much influence. He makes friends with a great number of lords and officers. He has already met Tokugawa Ieyasu to enjoy his favor. Ieyasu is ultimately to realize the unification of Japan. He has watched a chance to step into Hideyoshi's shoes, as he later reminisced about those days and spoke pertinently "Life is like walking a very long way bearing a heavy burden. We should not make haste nor get impatient."



Flowers and Plants
Kaiho Yusho

Myoshin-ji Temple, Kyoto

As soon as Hideyoshi died in 1598, some ambitious lords came into conflict with each other. Hideyoshi's retainers were utterly unable to devise any measures to cope with the situation so that immediately the Toyotomi regime collapsed. The war was brought on. All the lords were drawn into the war, and the eastern camp led by Tokugawa Ieyasu completely won.

In 1603 Tokugawa Ieyasu was inaugurated the shogun, but Hideyoshi's son was unseated. When Tokugawa shogunate government started functioning, Sansa was installed the first chief of the bureau of go education, and his vested rights were ratified formally by the new government. The office was called Go dokoro, and Go dokoro meant the chairman's office. Go dokoro was to be involved all go matters.

In 1612, seven experts, chief among Sansa's friends and students, were employed as committees under Go dokoro to establish the state go academy. The government decided to grant stipends and samurai status to them. When Sansa was dying, he told Doseki to succeed to his post. He raised up Doseki's rank to his own, and made all the young pupils swear to follow the new teacher. This second head of the academy, Doseki was Sansa's first and illustrious pupil. Today comparing with Sansa's games and Doseki's, we clearly think that he excelled his teacher. From reliable materials, we can know

Sansa was a half stone ahead (one rank ahead) from Rigen and Doseki in 1610s though. In fact, Doseki left no game with his teacher. Even considering Sansa left very few games, this can be usually read as Sansa's surrender. After Sansa's death, in accordance with his last wish, Doseki succeeded Sansa's office virtually and kept enjoying his time for seven years till his own death.



**Domaru Armor with Dark Blue Lacing,
Helmet and Wide Arm-Protectors**

Kenkun Shrine, Kyoto
[Kyoto National Museum](#)

In this chapter, examining the beginning phase of the some games of Sansa and Dosaku, We could deduce from them that they established their own style with some distinctive features. In summary, their style is based on following features:

1. Early approach
2. One space pincer
3. Anti-security system for early development to the side

As you may aware of it, there is few or not "the beginning phase" in their game. Figuratively speaking, The players are two horse warriors. They stand off face to face. One who finds the weakness in the opponent, approaches to another at full speed to make a frontal attack. If the wound is not fatal, another attack would follow it.

Therefore, I would like to call this a "vis a vis" style. A flow in their games is seemingly not rhythmic. We are visiting a museum of a primitive art. Their art is bursting with vitality. In order to appreciate the art of the early seventeenth players it is necessary to understand its development and its influence. In the next chapter, we would see Yasui Sanchi who introduced a new style of play based on two space pincer, speaking much more eloquently and getting into the rhythm.



Yukio Inoue

Yamahoko Procession

A parade float called "Yamahoko" and people are processioning the street. - Each town in Kyoto has kept thier own floats for some festivals for several centuries.



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Fushimi Castle